

# from Beowulf

Translated by Burton Raffel

Much of the action of this tale takes place in a banquet hall. Such a hall was a gathering place for a king and his warriors. It was where they feasted, celebrated, and slept.

## The Coming of Beowulf

So the living sorrow of Healfdane's son<sup>1</sup>  
105 Simmered, bitter and fresh, and no wisdom  
Or strength could break it: that agony hung  
On king and people alike, harsh  
And unending, violent and cruel, and evil.  
In his far-off home Beowulf, Higlac's<sup>2</sup>  
110 Follower and the strongest of the Geats—greater  
And stronger than anyone anywhere in this world—  
Heard how Grendel filled nights with horror  
And quickly commanded a boat fitted out,  
Proclaiming that he'd go to that famous king.  
115 Would sail across the sea to Hrothgar,  
Now when help was needed. None  
Of the wise ones regretted his going, much  
As he was loved by the Geats: the omens were good,  
And they urged the adventure on. So Beowulf  
120 Chose the mightiest men he could find,  
The bravest and best of the Geats, fourteen  
In all, and led them down to their boat;  
He knew the sea, would point the prow  
Straight to that distant Danish shore.  
125 Then they sailed, set their ship  
Out on the waves, under the cliffs.  
Ready for what came they wound through the  
currents,  
The seas beating at the sand, and were borne  
In the lap of their shining ship, lined  
130 With gleaming armor, going safely  
In that oak-hard boat to where their hearts took  
them.  
The wind hurried them over the waves,  
The ship foamed through the sea like a bird  
Until, in the time they had known it would take,  
135 Standing in the round-curved prow they could see  
Sparkling hills, high and green  
Jutting up over the shore, and rejoicing

1. Healfdane's (HAY alf DEN nuhz) son Hrothgar.

2. Higlac's (HIG laks) Higlac was the king of the Geats (GAY atz) and Beowulf's feudal lord and uncle.

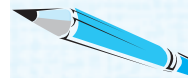


### Activate Prior Knowledge

Grendel, the monster in this tale, lives underwater, attacks humans, and has sharp claws. Basing your answer on your imagination and reading, what are three other details that might describe such a creature?

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2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

### Literary Analysis



The **epic** is a long narrative poem with a larger-than-life hero who battles against evil. In the underlined passage, circle one section that indicates the hero is mighty and one section that indicates he will be fighting against evil.

### Reading Strategy

**Paraphrase** the bracketed passage by restating in your own words the action it describes.

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# TAKE NOTES

## Literary Analysis

An **epic** usually describes a whole world. In the bracketed passage, circle words showing that the world of this epic is a dangerous one in which borders are closely guarded.

## Literary Analysis

An **epic** helps you understand the values of a people. Which details in the underlined passage indicate that leadership, courage, and fatherhood were important values for Anglo-Saxon warriors?

## Stop to Reflect

How do you think the watcher will react to Beowulf's speech? Why?

140 In those rock-steep cliffs they quietly ended  
Their voyage. Jumping to the ground, the Geats  
Pushed their boat to the sand and tied it  
In place, mail<sup>3</sup> shirts and armor rattling  
As they swiftly moored their ship. And then  
They gave thanks to God for their easy crossing.

145 High on a wall a Danish watcher  
Patrolling along the cliffs saw  
The travelers crossing to the shore, their shields  
Raised and shining; he came riding down,  
Hrothgar's lieutenant, spurring his horse,  
Needing to know why they'd landed, these men  
150 In armor. Shaking his heavy spear  
In their faces he spoke:

"Whose soldiers are you,  
You who've been carried in your deep-keeled ship  
Across the sea-road to this country of mine?  
Listen! I've stood on these cliffs longer  
155 Than you know, keeping our coast free  
Of pirates, raiders sneaking ashore  
From their ships, seeking our lives and our gold.  
None have ever come more openly—  
And yet you've offered no password, no sign  
160 From my prince, no permission from my people for  
your landing  
Here. Nor have I ever seen,  
Out of all the men on earth, one greater  
Than has come with you; no commoner carries  
Such weapons, unless his appearance, and his beauty,  
165 Are both lies. You! Tell me your name,  
And your father's; no spies go further onto Danish  
Soil than you've come already. Strangers,  
From wherever it was you sailed, tell it,  
And tell it quickly, the quicker the better,  
170 I say, for us all. Speak, say  
Exactly who you are, and from where, and why."

Their leader answered him, Beowulf unlocking  
Words from deep in his breast:

"We are Geats,  
Men who follow Higlac. My father  
175 Was a famous soldier, known far and wide  
As a leader of men. His name was Edgetho.  
His life lasted many winters;  
Wise men all over the earth surely  
Remember him still. And we have come seeking  
180 Your prince, Healfdane's son, protector  
Of this people, only in friendship: instruct us,  
Watchman, help us with your words! Our errand  
Is a great one, our business with the glorious king

3. mail flexible body armor made of metal.

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Of the Danes no secret; there's nothing dark  
 Or hidden in our coming. You know (if we've heard  
 The truth, and been told honestly) that your country  
 Is cursed with some strange, vicious creature  
 That hunts only at night and that no one  
 Has seen. It's said, watchman, that he has slaughtered  
 Your people, brought terror to the darkness. Perhaps  
 Hrothgar can hunt, here in my heart,  
 For some way to drive this devil out—  
 If anything will ever end the evils  
 Afflicting your wise and famous lord.  
 Here he can cool his burning sorrow.  
 Or else he may see his suffering go on  
 Forever, for as long as Herot towers  
 High on your hills."

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The mounted officer  
 Answered him bluntly, the brave watchman:  
 "A soldier should know the difference between  
 words

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And deeds, and keep that knowledge clear  
 In his brain. I believe your words, I trust in  
Your friendship. Go forward, weapons and armor  
And all, on into Denmark. I'll guide you  
Myself—and my men will guard your ship.  
 Keep it safe here on our shores,  
 Your fresh-tarred boat, watch it well,  
 Until that curving prow carries  
 Across the sea to Geatland a chosen  
 Warrior who bravely does battle with the creature  
 Haunting our people, who survives that horror  
 Unhurt, and goes home bearing our love."

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Then they moved on. Their boat lay moored,  
 Tied tight to its anchor. Glittering at the top  
 Of their golden helmets wild boar heads gleamed,  
 Shining decorations, swinging as they marched,  
 Erect like guards, like sentinels, as though ready  
 To fight. They marched, Beowulf and his men  
 And their guide, until they could see the gables  
 Of Herot, covered with hammered gold  
 And glowing in the sun—that most famous of all  
 dwellings,

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Towering majestic, its glittering roofs  
 Visible far across the land.  
 Their guide reined in his horse, pointing  
 To that hall, built by Hrothgar for the best  
 And bravest of his men; the path was plain,  
 They could see their way . . .

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### Reading Strategy

**Paraphrase** the bracketed section of Beowulf's speech, restating it in your own words.

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### Literary Analysis

In an **epic**, a **legendary hero** is someone who commands respect. What is it about Beowulf's appearance and words that causes the watchman to react as he does in the underlined passage?

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### Reading Check

Briefly summarize what has happened so far in the story.

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## TAKE NOTES

### Literary Analysis

The **legendary hero** in an **epic** boasts about his accomplishments. In the bracketed passage, identify and underline three boasts that Beowulf makes.



### Reading Strategy

In a **paraphrase**, use your own words to express what Beowulf tells Hrothgar in the bracketed passage (lines 236–255).

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*Beowulf and his men arrive at Herot and are about to be escorted in to see King Hrothgar.*

230 Beowulf arose, with his men  
Around him, ordering a few to remain  
With their weapons, leading the others quickly  
Along under Herot's steep roof into Hrothgar's  
Presence. Standing on that prince's own hearth,  
235 Helmeted, the silvery metal of his mail shirt  
Gleaming with a smith's high art, he greeted  
The Danes' great lord:  
"Hail, Hrothgar!  
Higlac is my cousin<sup>4</sup> and my king; the days  
Of my youth have been filled with glory. Now  
Grendel's  
240 Name has echoed in our land: sailors  
Have brought us stories of Herot, the best  
Of all mead-halls,<sup>5</sup> deserted and useless when the  
moon  
Hangs in skies the sun had lit,  
Light and life fleeing together.  
My people have said, the wisest, most knowing  
245 And best of them, that my duty was to go to the  
Danes'  
Great king. They have seen my strength for  
themselves,  
Have watched me rise from the darkness of war,  
Dripping with my enemies' blood. I drove  
250 Five great giants into chains, chased  
All of that race from the earth. I swam  
In the blackness of night, hunting monsters  
Out of the ocean, and killing them one  
By one; death was my errand and the fate  
They had earned. Now Grendel and I are called  
255 Together, and I've come. Grant me, then,  
Lord and protector of this noble place,  
A single request! I have come so far,  
Oh shelterer of warriors and your people's loved  
friend,  
That this one favor you should not refuse me—  
260 That I, alone and with the help of my men,  
May purge all evil from this hall. I have heard,

**Vocabulary Development:** **purge** (perj) *v.* purify; cleanse

4. **cousin** here, used as a general term for relative.

5. **mead-halls** To reward his thanes, the king in heroic literature would build a hall where mead (a drink made from fermented honey) was served.

Too, that the monster's scorn of men  
Is so great that he needs no weapons and fears none.  
Nor will I. My lord Higlac  
265 Might think less of me if I let my sword  
Go where my feet were afraid to, if I hid  
Behind some broad linden<sup>6</sup> shield: my hands  
Alone shall fight for me, struggle for life  
Against the monster. God must decide  
270 Who will be given to death's cold grip.  
Grendel's plan, I think, will be  
What it has been before, to invade this hall  
And gorge his belly with our bodies. If he can,  
If he can. And I think, if my time will have come,  
275 There'll be nothing to mourn over, no corpse to prepare  
For its grave: Grendel will carry our bloody  
Flesh to the moors, crunch on our bones  
And smear torn scraps of our skin on the walls  
Of his den. No, I expect no Danes  
280 Will fret about sewing our shrouds, if he wins.  
And if death does take me, send the hammered  
Mail of my armor to Higlac, return  
The inheritance I had from Hrethel, and he  
From Wayland.<sup>7</sup> Fate will unwind as it must!"

## The Battle with Grendel

*That night Beowulf and his men take the places of  
Hrothgar and the Danes inside Herot. While his men  
sleep, Beowulf lies awake, eager to meet with Grendel.*

285 Out from the marsh, from the foot of misty  
Hills and bogs, bearing God's hatred,  
Grendel came, hoping to kill  
Anyone he could trap on this trip to high Herot.  
He moved quickly through the cloudy night,  
290 Up from his swampland, sliding silently  
Toward that gold-shining hall. He had visited  
Hrothgar's  
Home before, knew the way—  
But never, before nor after that night,  
Found Herot defended so firmly, his reception  
295 So harsh. He journeyed, forever joyless,  
Straight to the door, then snapped it open,  
Tore its iron fasteners with a touch  
And rushed angrily over the threshold.  
He strode quickly across the inlaid  
300 Floor, snarling and fierce: his eyes

6. **linden** very sturdy type of wood.

7. **Wayland** from Germanic folklore, an invisible blacksmith.

### Literary Analysis

Why do Beowulf's words in the underlined passage make him seem like an impressive **hero**?

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### Literary Analysis

What, if anything, is **heroic** about Beowulf's detailed description of what will happen to him if he loses the battle with Grendel?

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### Reading Check

What does Grendel do as Beowulf and his men wait in the banquet hall?

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## TAKE NOTES

### Literary Analysis

This **epic** expresses the Anglo-Saxon belief in fate, a mysterious power that determines the outcome of events. In the bracketed passage, circle the words that reveal this belief. Then, after reviewing page 9, write the number of the line in which Beowulf also refers to fate.

### Reading Strategy

**Paraphrase** the description in the underlined passage.

### Stop to Reflect

Compare and contrast Grendel's and Beowulf's reactions to this fight.

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Gleamed in the darkness, burned with a gruesome  
Light. Then he stopped, seeing the hall  
Crowded with sleeping warriors, stuffed  
With rows of young soldiers resting together.

And his heart laughed, he relished the sight,  
Intended to tear the life from those bodies  
By morning; the monster's mind was hot  
With the thought of food and the feasting his belly  
Would soon know. But fate, that night, intended

Grendel to gnaw the broken bones  
Of his last human supper. Human  
Eyes were watching his evil steps,  
Waiting to see his swift hard claws.  
Grendel snatched at the first Geat  
He came to, ripped him apart, cut  
His body to bits with powerful jaws,  
Drank the blood from his veins and bolted  
Him down, hands and feet; death  
And Grendel's great teeth came together,  
Snapping life shut. Then he stepped to another  
Still body, clutched at Beowulf with his claws,  
Grasped at a strong-hearted wakeful sleeper  
—And was instantly seized himself, claws  
Bent back as Beowulf leaned up on one arm.

That shepherd of evil, guardian of crime,  
Knew at once that nowhere on earth  
Had he met a man whose hands were harder;  
His mind was flooded with fear—but nothing  
Could take his talons and himself from that tight  
Hard grip. Grendel's one thought was to run  
From Beowulf, flee back to his marsh and hide there:  
This was a different Herot than the hall he had  
emptied.

But Higlac's follower remembered his final  
Boast and, standing erect, stopped  
The monster's flight, fastened those claws  
In his fists till they cracked, clutched Grendel  
Closer. The infamous killer fought  
For his freedom, wanting no flesh but retreat,  
Desiring nothing but escape; his claws  
Had been caught, he was trapped. That trip to Herot  
Was a miserable journey for the writhing monster!

The high hall rang, its roof boards swayed,  
And Danes shook with terror. Down  
The aisles the battle swept, angry  
And wild. Herot trembled, wonderfully

**Vocabulary Development:** writhing (RYTH ing) *adj.* making twisting or turning motions





## TAKE NOTES

### Literary Analysis

Is hanging Grendel's arm from the rafters an appropriate action for a **legendary hero**? Why or why not?

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395 Had been granted new glory: Grendel escaped,  
But wounded as he was could flee to his den,  
His miserable hole at the bottom of the marsh,  
Only to die, to wait for the end  
Of all his days. And after that bloody  
Combat the Danes laughed with delight.  
He who had come to them from across the sea,  
400 Bold and strong-minded, had driven affliction  
Off, purged Herot clean. He was happy,  
Now, with that night's fierce work; the Danes  
Had been served as he'd boasted he'd serve them;  
Beowulf,  
A prince of the Geats, had killed Grendel,  
405 Ended the grief, the sorrow, the suffering  
Forced on Hrothgar's helpless people  
By a bloodthirsty fiend. No Dane doubted  
The victory, for the proof, hanging high  
From the rafters where Beowulf had hung it, was the  
monster's  
410 Arm, claw and shoulder and all.

**Reader's Response:** Would the battle between Grendel and Beowulf make a good action movie? Why or why not?

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**Thinking About the Skill:** Did paraphrasing help you better understand passages that seemed difficult at first? Explain.

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